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ABSTRACT

Minority gangs of the 1980s are examined as groups of juveniles and young adults and as a fraction of the forming underclass. Gangs today no longer disappear as their ethnic groups rises socially. Instead, gangs are becoming institutionalized in the central cities. This discussion of prior research in Los Angeles (California) and more recent studies in Milwaukee (Wisconsin) demonstrates that gangs are quite different than they were in the past. Underclass in this discussion refers to people permanently excluded from participation in mainstream occupations who survive through a combination of economic resources that can include welfare and profits from crime. In neither of the Chicano communities studied in Los Angeles or Milwaukee have the gangs become involved in an organized crime infrastructure. Instead, a fraction of each gang clique moves into the underclass as the gang becomes an institutionalized feature of some poverty communities and plays a role in the perpetuation of the underclass. In both cities gangs have also become support groups in correctional settings. Interviews with 47 gang members from 19 of Milwaukee's gangs form the basis of this exploration. Five appendixes present the study questionnaire and four tables of gang data. (Contains 3 figures, 6 tables, 4 appendix tables, and 144 references.) (SLD)

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